

Good morning, Bongeen Church of Christ, and congratulations on 40 years of meeting together as a fellowship of believers and disciples, of Jesus Christ.

Robyn and I are really glad to be here today, but we didn't think that we were going to make it. We'd already decided that we **weren't** coming, because today's our Sunday School presentation in St George, and we reckoned that we should be there.... But God had other plans.

When I was driving to Dirranbandi the other night (for our evening service):

- I prayed about our church and the direction God would have us going.
- I prayed about our **unity**, and for our continued meeting together as a community of Disciples of Jesus.
- I also prayed specifically for **me** and how **I** am to serve God. And I laid it all on the altar and I said "God, not my will, but your will, always." I will go wherever you want. I will do whatever you direct. You just have to make it very clear to me, what it is **Your** will, and I'll do it.

Have you ever prayed a prayer like that? It's a dangerous prayer. You could end up being at a place like "Bongeen" for the weekend....

Anyway, I prayed that prayer, and a short while later, I arrived at Dirranbandi. And only a few minutes after my arrival, "Ding!!", and there's a text from Rhonda, once again asking ,

“Have you decided yet? Are you coming?” (she’s persistent – we’ve got to give her that). And she asked:

“Would you be willing to speak on what it means to be the church, disciples of Christ, and importance of ‘belonging’ to a community of believers?”

And it struck me: Not only was this an echo of all the things I had just prayed about, but the whole purpose of Bush Disciples. It was like God said to me “Is that clear enough for you yet?” And I said “Righto, we’re off to Bongeene for the weekend.” And here we are.

So, what **does** it mean to be the church; disciples of Christ, and what **is** the importance of belonging to a community of believers?

Justin’s going to read Ephesians 4:1-6.

Ephesians 4:1-6 (ESV)

Unity in the Body of Christ

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, ⁶ one God

and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Righto.

By reading a few sentences, from the middle of the book of Ephesians, effectively what we've just done, is we've read a tiny snippet of somebody else's mail, which is a pretty strange thing to do, so, let's put what we've just read, into the context of the whole letter...

The first 3 chapters of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, focus on what we as Christians believe. He reminds us about the glorious riches that we have, in the grace of Christ. Now of course, the riches of Christ have nothing to do with anything as trivial as silver or gold... It's all about the wonderful gift and privilege, that it is, to be called as the children of God – even though we don't deserve it.

And now, as we come into chapter 4, we have the "therefore". **Because** of the way that we've been included in Christ, **therefore**, we should **walk in a manner worthy of** [that] **calling ...**

Why do you think Jesus called you???

- Is it because you are so lovable?
- Is it because of your magnetic personality?
- Is it because you're 'good-lookin'', and Jesus likes to be with good-lookin' people?
- Is it because of your popularity, and Jesus likes to be with the 'in-crowd'? ; or

- Is it because you're really smart or witty? And Jesus likes to get a good old belly laugh with all of your jokes???
- Maybe it's because you're so successful, and Jesus enjoys being with successful people????

Does anyone believe that any of those reasons, is why Jesus called them???

You realise what I'm doing, don't you? I'm looking to see who's going to put their hand up, to confess to being a narcissist... Come on, it's time to 'fess up – this is your chance to say, "It's all about me."... Jesus chose me for me, because I'm so wonderful...

It's not, is it. It's **not** all about us. It's all about Jesus. And this is the thing – He calls us, who are so "unworthy", to the highest calling, that anyone can ever be called – to be a child of God – to be an ambassador for Christ,,,,, not because we deserve it, but because that is what Christ does – he calls those who **don't** deserve it.

He laid down His life. He shed His blood on the cross, to make it possible...

Chapter 2:⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is **not** your own doing; it is the gift of God,

We have been saved to the very **highest** of callings... Wow!!! Is anyone at all, excited about that? You'd better be.

And what difference should that make in our lives? ... Well, it should make every difference...

We have this high calling, therefore we should live in a manner, worthy of that calling.

Does anyone here remember the name, "Marcus Einfeld"? He used to be known as "Justice Einfeld O.A. (Order of Australia). He was a very highly respected and influential Federal Judge.

In January 2006, Justice Einfeld's car was caught on a speed camera, going 10km/hr over the speed limit, earning him a \$77 fine, and loss of points.... Now, rather than 'cop that', he signed a Stat. Dec., saying that an old friend of his from the US, was driving his car, and so he got let off. ...

*But **then** it was revealed, that the person who Justice Einfeld testified, was driving his car, had died 3 years earlier... and so this very powerful Federal Judge, had perjured himself... And his perjury kept mounting up as he continued to try and lie his way out of it... Does anyone here remember the case???*

What made it news??? If ordinary old Joe-Blow down the street lied on a Stat. Dec. over a \$77 speeding fine, we'd never hear about it, would we???

Why was this case any different???

Well, as a federal judge, Marcus Einfeld had a very high calling. And we the community have an expectation, that he would walk in a manner worthy of that calling... But he didn't. He lied to the court, when his calling, was to uphold

justice. And so he was convicted, and sentenced to a non-parole period of 2 years jail. He was stripped of his judgeship, and quite rightly stripped of his Order of Australia...

Now, as Christians, we have a **higher** calling, than a federal judge... And we are to walk, in a manner worthy **of** our calling, and that's what discipleship is all about. We are called, to not only believe in Jesus, but to follow Jesus, in all His ways. That's called "Christ-likeness"...

We follow our saviour, in the power of the Holy Spirit, accepting that His ways are higher than our ways.... And because Jesus is Lord, He is Lord of our whole life. We obey Him, and we follow Him, in **every** area of our life...

But in this reading, it's specifically talking about our relationship with other Christians. **To walk in a manner, worthy of our calling, is to walk together with other Christians...**

I ride a push-bike for exercise. And when I go for a ride, I find I prefer to ride by myself. If I take somebody with me, they're either too slow, and my heart rate isn't up enough, and I'm not getting enough exercise, Or, they're just too good for me, and they bust me – I might be able to keep up for them for 15-20km, but then I just can't match them any more.... And so I like to just ride by myself...

And some people are like that, when it comes to their walk with God. Some people feel that to move on spiritually, they have to shake off everyone who might be holding them back,

and so they distance themselves from other Christians, who they feel aren't good enough. They feel these other Christians are (well, they're not quite right; They're not dedicated enough; They're not spiritual enough; They're not enthused enough)...

But then there's others who like to 'go-it-alone' because when they're with other Christians, they feel they get pushed too hard – They're getting pushed, to where they don't want to go... They're getting pushed, to repent of sins they'd rather hold on to; They're getting pushed to go deeper with God, when they just want to stay shallow; They'd rather just poke along slow, with God, in their own way and not be challenged too much...

And I've heard it said, so many times "I don't have to go to church to be a Christian."... Which I used to think was sort of true, but the more I read the Scriptures, the more I realise, no, that's not true... .

To walk in a manner, worthy of our calling, is to walk together with other Christians... - not to walk away from them

This very high calling that we have, is to be the church, together, in humility; and gentleness; and patience; bearing with one another in love; being eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...

This is what it means, to walk in a manner, worthy of our calling.

Now, I don't know anything much about your history, but if you're anything like most churches, to walk together for 40 years, I suspect there's been a fair bit of bearing with one another, gentleness, humility and patience.... Am I right??? Or has it all been easy? Is this the perfect church, and you're all perfect Christians???

To walk in a manner, worthy of our calling, is to walk together with other Christians...

And we do it, because this is the unity of the Spirit.

If anyone is feeling that they're getting 'held back' by others in the church, where's your humility and your gentleness, and your patience??? The weak don't hold us back – they give us strength as we practice our humility and our gentleness, and as we gently encourage them on...

If anyone is feeling, "It's just all too hard to get on with other people in the church.", where's the eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit? In Jesus Christ, is there not, a bond of peace? Are we not called to bear with one another in love?

To walk in a manner, worthy of our calling, is to walk together in peace, even with those who we find difficult...

There is **one** body. There is **one** Spirit. We are called to **one** hope... That means for Christians, there's one destination. We're all on the same bus, to the same destination. Look around you... These are your brothers and sisters in Christ... And if you can't spend 'life' with them, how are you going to

spend eternity with them? We share in the one hope. We're bound together, for eternity, in Christ Jesus...

Let's pray,
Lord, we pray for the Christian church here in this district.

Lord, we want to thank you, for Your calling.
Lord, we recognise, that we are the least worthy,
to be called to that very high calling,
Of being Your children,
And yet, you have called us anyway.

By grace we have been saved through faith.
And this is **not** of our own doing;
it is the gift of God,

Lord, help us,
To walk in a manner worthy of this calling.
Fill us with Your Holy Spirit.
Produce in us, the fruit of the Spirit

Give to us, humility; and gentleness; and patience.
Fill us with Your holy love,
And help us to bear with one another, in that love.
Lord, we are eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.

By Your Holy Spirit, make this possible.

Lord, Your word tells us,
that the world will know that we are Your disciples,
by the love that we have for one another.

I pray that you would bless this church here at Bongeen, with
a deep love

A love that will bear witness to the world,
Of the Lord Jesus Christ,

In Jesus' name,
Amen.